



A Rainforest Bushfood Garden

TIN Topic 4

Many people do not realise that trees, shrubs, herbs and groundcovers that are native to the Newcastle/Lake Macquarie/Port Stephens area provide a great variety of fruits, leaves, stems, tubers and seeds which could be considered as “bushfoods”.

Many of the popular native bushfood plants (such as *Syzygium luehmanii* / Riberry, *Austromyrtus dulcis* / Midyim Berry, *Macadamia integrifolia* / Macadamia Nut, *Backhousia citriodora* / Lemon Myrtle, *Araucaria bidwillii* / Bunya Nut, and *Microcitrus australasica* / Round Lime) are not local plants.

Increasingly, at Trees In Newcastle, we are getting requests for Species Lists for local bushfood gardens, so here is the first of them, this time with a rainforest theme. Before we begin though, there are a few things to be wary of before you turn your backyard or schoolyard or corner reserve into Gondwana:

- Many of the trees mentioned can be large, so you’ll need a bit of room with no overhead power lines and no underground services
- Many “Gondwanans” probably keeled over after experimenting with bushfoods, so don’t eat anything or let your kids eat anything unless you are 100% sure it is an edible species from an unpolluted source.
- Also remember that, as with our usual fruit, there can be an amazing variety of taste: some Lillypillies are quite palatable, while others will turn you inside out with their astringency. Other bushfoods will turn you inside out for another reason, especially if you eat too much of it; perhaps they could market them as laxatives.
- Not all species will be immediately available, particularly when local provenance is required. Species not available could be propagated for future planting.



Hibiscus heterophyllus



Eupomatia laurina



Alecxyron subciner-

Trees and Shrubs



Syzygium smithii

***Syzygium (Acmena) smithii* - Creek Lillipilly.** This Lillipilly is quite common in many of the creeklines and rainforest pockets around the local area. It can grow into a large, decorative tree in time, but in the home garden responds well to pruning or hedging. It forms a dense canopy, often growing in copses, and is a favoured roost tree for many of the local owl species. The taste of the fruit is extremely variable, but can be made into jam, chutney or sauce



Acronychia oblongifolia

***Acronychia oblongifolia* - Common Acronychia.** Again, this tree can grow large in time and is found in many of the littoral rainforest remnants around the local area (Greenplay Point, Taylor's Beach, Glenrock SCA, Green Point, Awaba Bay, Pelican, Salts Bay, Pinny Beach, Nesca Park, Cams Wharf) and some of the gully rainforest remnants (Floraville, Tickhole Creek, Warners Bay, Bangalay Reserve). The leaves and fruit are aromatic with a lemony smell, and the fruit when fresh has an acid, lemon flavour. Most fruit is quite astringent, but the ones at Nesca Park are very palatable. Like many rainforest trees, *Acronychia* will produce an abundance of fruit every two or three years, with hardly any fruit in between. This is why it is important to preserve as many of these rainforest pockets as possible, as the migratory frugivores (e.g. rainforest pigeons and fruit bats) are dependant on this food source. Perhaps if you plant some rainforest

fruiting trees at your place, they'll visit you and leave my Mango alone!

***Alectryon subcinereus* - Native Quince.** The fruit of this particular species does nothing for me, but then I don't like quince either. The tree is an attractive, medium to large tree with decorative fruit (green skin, red aril and black seed) and is found in most of the rainforest pockets in Newcastle /Lake Macquarie / Port Stephens. The birds love it.

***Backhousia myrtifolia* - Grey Myrtle.** Overshadowed by its more illustrious cousins, *Backhousia citriodora* / Lemon Myrtle and *Backhousia anisata* / Aniseed Myrtle, the Grey Myrtle is commonly found growing as a rainforest edge species on the south to south-east facing slopes of the deeper valleys in the local area, where it can form an interesting mid-storey monoculture (resembling Mirkwood from "The Lord of the Rings"). The leaf of this species is supposed to have a nutmeg flavour but, if so, I can't discern it. Nevertheless, it is a suitable, small to medium tree with massed white flowers for the home garden.

***Diploglottis australis* - Native Tamarind.** A tall, almost palm-like, tropical-looking tree, the Native Tamarind can be found in sheltered gullies at Glenrock SCA, Green Point, Floraville, Bangalay Reserve, Warners Bay, and west to the Watagans. The Native Tamarind produces masses of yellow/orange fruit every several years, which is most often noticed by the fallen fruit on the forest floor. Collecting the fallen fruit soon after it drops and before the ants get it, is the only practical way to gather the fruit, unless you are an extremely agile tree climber with appropriate insurance. The fruit is quite acid and astringent, and would be most suited to making sauces, as with the Asian Tamarind. Most of the fruit is likely to disappear courtesy of the birds and bats, and, for this reason, the tree makes an excellent inclusion in a Backyard Gondwana along with *Archontophoenix cunninghamii* / Bangalow Palm and *Livistona australis* / Cabbage Tree Palm.

***Eupomatia laurina* - Bolwarra.** This glossy-leaved, understory/mid-storey rainforest shrub is common in nearly all the local rainforest pockets. It has a scented, white flower which turns into a globular, greenish yellow fruit which is only palatable when it is really soft and ripe. The Bolwarra is one of the native rainforest trees which is also called Native Guava. This shrub is a primitive legacy of the first flowering plants of Gondwana.

***Ficus coronata* - Creek Sandpaper Fig**

***Ficus fraseri* - Fraser's Sandpaper Fig**

***Ficus rubiginosa* - Port Jackson Fig.** Of all the local figs, the Creek Sandpaper Fig is the most palatable. Its blue-black fruit distinguishes it from Fraser's Fig which has orange-red fruit, and Port Jackson Fig which has yellow-orange fruit when ripe. None of the native figs are anywhere near as tasty as the Mediterranean fig, but again frugivores like Satin Bowerbirds, Regent Bowerbirds, Olive-backed Orioles, Southern Figbirds, Green Catbirds and fruit bats love them, so the figs are useful inclusions in riparian, habitat plantings.



***Hibiscus heterophyllus*/*Hibiscus splendens* - Native Hibiscus.** One of these, *Hibiscus heterophyllus*, is a shrub with lobed leaves and pink/white, edible flowers, also called Native Rosella. *Hibiscus splendens* is a larger shrub/small tree with white flowers.

***Pouteria (Planchonella) australis* - Black Apple.** Many of our accepted exotic fruiting species (Mango, Guava, Lychee, Coffee, and Avocado, for example) started off as rainforest species in some Asian, African or South American jungle. They have been developed over many years to have the tastes we now are so familiar with. Black Apple is an Australian species which has such potential: indeed, it is related to some of the South American sub-tropical fruit trees making their way onto the local market like the Black Sapote, White Sapote and Canistel-*Pouteria campechiana*. The fruit is the largest of all the local bushtucker fruits (about the size of a nectarine) and is blue/black with purplish flesh. Again, it is found in most of the local rainforest pockets and the taste is variable. The ecologist, Tim Flannery, has a theory that where there are such large-fruited rainforest species, such as the Black Apple and the Davidson's Plum-*Davidsonia* spp. (which occur North of Coffs Harbour), it indicates a past distribution of a large frugivorous bird species like the Cassowary.

***Rhodomyrtus psidioides* - Native Guava.** The Native Guava is an attractive mid-storey rainforest tree with aromatic foliage (bubblegum) and scented white flowers. The fruits are also creamy white and aromatic. It is not edible.

***Sambucus australasica* - Native Elderberry.** This species is a shrub rather than a tree and has small yellow fruit which is among the tastiest of all the local bushtucker fruits. It is not common in the local rainforests and would be easily overlooked when not in flower or fruit.



***Syzygium oleosum* - Blue Lillipilly**

***Syzygium paniculatum* - Magenta Lillipilly (Threatened Species).** Of the local Lillipillies, the Magenta Lillipilly is the tastiest with an apple-like crunch to the fresh fruit. Magenta Lillipilly is a threatened species.

Groundcovers / Ferns / Grasses

***Alpinia caerulea* - Native Ginger.** In appearance, Native Ginger is very much like the Asian Ginger we use in cooking and has a rhizome with a more delicate flavour that can be used in the same way. The Native Ginger has a small, blue, many-seeded fruit with little flesh that is also edible: Aboriginal trails in the coastal forests were supposedly edged by the Native Ginger plants, as the people chewed the fruit as they walked, and spat out the many seeds. The fruit would not satisfy hunger, but has a refreshing, slightly clove-like taste. The glossy leaves and “tropical” appearance make this plant a suitable, understory fill-in plant for a palm filled Gondwanan garden. It would be good around a pond as a frog habitat plant.

***Blechnum indicum* - Swamp Water Fern, Bungwall Fern.** The starchy rhizome of this fern was a staple food of local Aboriginal people. It is commonly found in the local area as a dominant groundcover in Swamp Mahogany / Paperbark forests.

***Commelina cyanea* - Scurvy Weed, Creeping Christian.** This plant is a great groundcover with small blue flowers. Teamed with Native Violet in a damp, shady situation, it will quickly cover the ground. The leaves can be steamed and used as a vegetable. It grows so prolifically that many people think it is a weed, confusing it with *Tradescantia albiflora* / Wandering Jew, which usually has white flowers.

***Dianella caerulea* - Paroo Lily.** A very popular landscaping plant, *Dianella* has sprays of bright blue berries in spring/summer. The berries are edible and refreshing, but you would have to eat a lot of them to satisfy an appetite.

***Lomandra longifolia* - Mat Rush.** Some bushtucker plants would have to be killed to access the edible parts (like *Livistona australis*-Cabbage Tree Palm for example). This is also true of Mat Rush which has edible stems.

***Viola hederacea* - Native Violet.** Like *Commelina*, Native Violet is an excellent groundcover. It has light blue/mauve/white flowers, depending on the soil type it's growing in. The flowers are edible and make an interesting garnish to a tossed salad.

Massed planting of the above groundcovers in a rainforest bushtucker garden would solve all your weed problems.



Commelina cyanea



Dianella caerulea



Viola hederacea

Vines

Less vigorous vines (*) could be planted with the groundcovers/ ferns /grasses.

More vigorous vines should only be planted when canopy has established, and trees and shrubs are at least 2-3 metres tall.

***Cayratia clematidea* - Slender Grape**

***Cissus antartica* - Kangaroo Grape**

***Cissus hypoglauca* - Native Grape**, Water Vine. None of the black-fruited Native Grapes are particularly palatable, but the vines are useful quick replacement plants as habitat where canopy is still intact. In sites where canopy has been lost or in revegetation projects, do not plant any of the Native Grapes early, as they will smother young shrub and tree growth.

Dioscorea transversa* - Native Yam. This is one of the bushtucker plants which you would have to dig up to access the edible tuber. It is a gentle climber or scrambler for the understory/mid-storey of a rainforest garden.

Eustrephus latifolius* - Wombat Berry. A gently scrambling climber, Wombat Berry can be found in most of the bushland reserves around the local area. It is not restricted to rainforest remnants, but is usually noticed only when in fruit scrambling through the shrub layer. The fruit is yellow-orange and not particularly tasty.

***Maclura cochinchinensis* - Cockspur Thorn**. An extremely thorny shrub/scrambler or climber depending upon the situation in which it is growing, Cockspur Thorn can be found locally at Greenplay Point, Kooragang Island, Black Hill, Cedar Hill, Martinsville, Awaba Bay, Green Point Foreshore Reserve, Glenrock SCA, Pelican Flat, Salts Bay, Galgabba Point and Cams Wharf. It has a tasty, orange fruit but don't eat too much of it!

***Passiflora herbertiana* - Native Passionfruit**. You'll have to fight the possums for this one! Native Passionfruit is not as vigorous as the exotic varieties, some of which have become weeds, but it is an attractive scrambler/ climber with a similar flower and fruit to the South American species.

***Rubus hillii* - Native Raspberry**

***Rubus parvifolius* - Native Raspberry**. The Native Raspberries look quite similar to the weed species, Blackberry, but are usually not as vigorous. The fruit, which is red when ripe (Spring/ Summer), is not in large numbers on individual plants, and varies considerably in taste: some being quite palatable. As with Black Apple, work is being undertaken with some Native Raspberries to develop a commercially viable variety.